

Specialist says river should have blue-ribbon fishing

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HEBER CITY — A Bureau of Reclamation environmental specialist told the Wasatch County Commission Monday that he agrees with the county's stand that the Provo River, between Jordanelle and Deer Creek Reservoirs, should be a blue ribbon fishery and that private property should not be taken by the Bureau.

Commission Chairman Moroni Besendorfer owns property for about half a mile along the river and has organized a task force of property owners who are promoting the Jordanelle Parkway on the river for blue-ribbon fishing only. When he told the Bureau representative, Lee Swenson, that the landowners would voluntarily allow access across their property under those conditions, Swenson said that also was his recommendation and that he didn't know any other plan was being considered by the Bureau. The only plan he knew about was to get access across private property for fishing. He accepted Besendorfer's invitation to talk with the task force during their next meeting.

Swenson's purpose in meeting with the commission was to ask for help to get permission for inspectors to cross private property in order to inspect part of the river during the next several weeks. He said a subcontractor had been hired to make preliminary recommendations for designs to enhance fish habitat. Besendorfer offered access across his property and to help the inspectors with his knowledge of the river and the fish.

He recommended that the Bureau listen to the landowners, particularly those who have farmed along the river all their lives and know more about it than anyone else.

Swenson explained that to get credit for the fishing mitigation requirement for the CUP project, fisheries must be enhanced and

access has to be provided. He said the plans for the river must be approved by the county as well as by the Army Corps of Engineers and the State.

He said pools would be created to provide hiding cover and spawning areas for trout, without increasing the potential for flooding, and that no major equipment would be used.

Commissioner LaRen Provost asked if fences would be built to keep cows away from the river. Swenson replied that cows are hard on banks, preventing undercutting that provides natural security for fish. However, he said the contractor would work with farmers and cited an example on Indian Creek where fences have been built in such a way that they allow watering access for cows.

Besendorfer said he found it interesting that the Bureau spent thousands of dollars to kill the fish in the river before the water was turned over to the Provo River water users, about 40 years ago, and is now going to spend millions to rehabilitate. He said if the river were allowed to just "work its own course," there would soon be good fish habitat. He also said there would be good fishing if the State Department of Wildlife Management would properly manage the system.

He warned Swenson, "It will ruin the river and everything around it if the Bureau condemns that property along the river, and allows all-terrain vehicles, and four-wheel drives, and pickup trucks, and camping. They'll wipe it out completely. There won't be a fox. There won't be anything. Plus, the farmers' livestock and ranchers' livestock will be destroyed. If the Bureau condemns and takes property, then it's for public use and the public's going to demand access to it."

He said if the Bureau accepts the task force's recommendations, landowners will voluntarily allow access and wildlife will be preserved.

